



PARENT PAYMENTS (DET Overview) POLICY

Latest DET Update: 17/03/2020

First Developed in This Format: January 2018

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February and April 2020

Rationale

- Open and purposeful engagement with parents is vital for ensuring the best possible outcomes for students, the health and wellbeing of the school community and to supporting good outcomes for schools. Research demonstrates that the most meaningful partnerships are those where schools, parents, students and the community work together to focus on student learning.
- The [Framework for Improving Student Outcomes](#) recognises that the greatest impact on student outcomes is the home environment. When schools strengthen relationships with families, they can enhance the environment that has the greatest impact on students. Schools acknowledge this valuable relationship and as part of a whole of school approach, work to create a positive school environment in which parents are welcomed, respected and valued as partners in their children's learning.
- Parent consultation and engagement is therefore critical in all aspects of the educational context including parent payments. To identify and understand the needs of families who are hard to reach and disengaged schools are encouraged to connect with and engage their local welfare and community organisations that provide support for these families.
- It is critical that school communities, parents, key stakeholders and the Department can see how the parent payment policy is being implemented at the local level. Therefore, ensuring schools assess the impact of the policy on students and parents is important.
- The [Transparency Framework \(docx - 88 \(docx - 87.28kb\)](#) assists schools in their implementation and compliance with the policy. It includes a Transparency Checklist Tool that enables self-assessment of open and transparent processes and practices. This tool can be used to provide a good practice framework upon which policy implementation can be regularly reviewed and reported on. Schools are strongly encouraged to work through the checklist at least annually.
- Schools can request payments from parents under three categories: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.
- Each school determines whether an item, activity or service is an Essential Student Learning Item or an Optional Item within the context of their distinct learning and teaching program. Schools must be able to communicate the rationale for the classification of items, activities or services, requested and charged.

Purpose

- To ensure that parent payment practices at Meredith Primary School are consistent with other schools, transparent and that all children have access to the standard curriculum.
- To ensure school-level parent payment policies and processes are compliant with the DET's policy requirements.
- To ensure the school complies with the legislative requirements of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

Definitions

Under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, in relation to a child, "parent" includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the

Family Law Act 1975 of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

Essential Student Learning Items

These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning in the standard curriculum. Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own. Examples are:

- items that the student takes temporary or permanent possession of such as text books, student stationery, book bags, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. technology projects, workbooks, photography)
- school uniform (where applicable)
- activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend such as cost associated with excursions and work placements

Note: If parents choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this should be done in consultation with the school, and items should meet the specifications provided by the school. However, there are some items (e.g. food provisions for home economics) which, due to their nature, can only be provided by the school.

Optional Items

These are items or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students may access these on a user pays basis. These items include:

- activities the student purchases (e.g. fees for extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum such as instrumental music tuition; fees for guest speakers; optional camps and excursions; entry fees to school-based performances, productions and events)
- items the student purchases or hires (e.g. school magazines; class photos; formals/graduation functions; materials for extracurricular activities; student accident insurance)
- items and materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum (e.g. use of silver in metal work instead of copper)

Voluntary Financial Contributions

Parents/carers, or anyone else, can be invited to make a **voluntary contribution** to the school for the following purposes:

- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (e.g. equipment, materials or services) in addition to those funded through the SRP. This may include additional computers or student-related services and are NOT tax deductible
- general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school and are NOT tax deductible
- donations to a building trust fund or contributions to a library trust fund (these trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office, have a Deductible Gift Recipients (DGR) status and are tax deductible to the donor)

Implementation

- **The school will use the mandatory [Parent Payment Policy and Implementation Template](#) when developing the school's parent payment arrangements and have this approved by School Council.** This will ensure the school can customise the implementation of the policy to the local context whilst retaining all information in the policy template, thereby facilitating consistent implementation of key practices across schools.
- As required by DET, the school will adhere to the following principles:
 - **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing will be paramount in determining parent payments practices
 - **Access, equity and inclusion:** All students will have access to the standard curriculum program and participation of all students to the full school program will be facilitated
 - **Affordability:** Cost to parents/carers will be kept to a minimum and be affordable for most families at the school

- **Engagement and Support:** Early identification and engagement strategies to ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and supports available for those experiencing hardship
- **Respect and Confidentiality:** Parents/carers and students experiencing hardship will be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement and the identity and personal information of all parents/carers and students will be kept confidential in respect to parent payments
- **Transparency and Accountability:** School parent payment practices will be well communicated, clear and transparent and their impact on student programs and families will be reviewed by the School Council
- Students will not be denied access to the standard curriculum program, be refused instruction or disadvantaged on the basis of payments not being made for education items or services.
- Where a child cannot participate in an essential activity or provide an essential student learning item, the school will consider the financial hardship circumstances of the student and make alternative arrangements that provides for the required knowledge and skills to be learned. This ensures that all children and young people learn the required content necessary to meet the achievement standards in the standard curriculum program.
- It is essential that when the School Council considers the proposed requests for parent payment that cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families. The Principal will ensure that:
 - School Council is aware of and understands the views of its community in determining payments
 - the school does not withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment for any of the three categories
 - items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
 - payment requests for goods, services and other items provided by the school to students are broadly itemised within the appropriate category (see: parent payment categories above)
 - parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning items themselves, in consultation with the school. This does not include activities set by the school
 - the school ensures information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood by parents/carers, ensuring they know what to expect and what supports they can access
 - the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and shared only with relevant school personnel
 - payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used
 - parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for school fees, that is, a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year which enables parents to plan and budget accordingly
 - parents are provided with reasonable notice for any other payment requests that arise during the school year, ensuring that parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
 - parents experiencing hardship will not be pursued for outstanding school payments from one year to the next
 - the use of debt collectors of any type to obtain any outstanding funds owed to the school from parents is not permitted
- Initial payment requests and letters to parents for student materials and services charges must be accompanied by the following information:
 - a description of each of the three parent payment categories
 - the materials and activities that parents are being asked to pay for
 - that parents are expected to provide Essential Student Learning Items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or to purchase them independently, where appropriate

- the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the Principal or nominated parent payment contact person, if the parent wishes to discuss the payments further
- copy of or link to the Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Administrative and financial processes must be compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES21 financial reporting and that:
 - prior to generating reminder notices to parents for unpaid items, discretion should be exercised with families where there may be hardship or financial difficulty
 - invoices/statements for unpaid essential student learning items or optional items accepted by parents can be generated and distributed according to parent payment arrangements, but no more than monthly
 - only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice per year is sent to all parents
 - receipts are issued to parents immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES21
 - all documents relating to individual parent payments are stored confidentially in a secure location and accessible only to the principal, business manager and other nominated staff ensuring identifiable parent information is kept confidential
- The school will ensure open and purposeful engagement with parents including consultation with parents in all aspects of the educational context including parent payment processes.
- As a minimum the school will:
 - advise parents how the school's learning and teaching program is enhanced by the parent payment charges being requested
 - communicate how parent payments are specifically utilised to support improved outcomes for students
 - use existing or new communication channels to enable a range of viewpoints to be represented
 - address any concerns raised
 - ensure parents are informed and understand that while they are expected to provide essential education items to support their child's education, it is their choice whether they purchase items through the school
 - ensure parents are made aware of financial and other supports available to them and the means to access them
 - upload the Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions onto the school's website.
- The Principal and School Council are aware of, and will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial cultural or social circumstances of individual students. This will extend to the provision of interpreting and translations services where this would be helpful. If necessary, the free interpreting and translation services available through DET to support schools in communicating written and verbal information in languages other than English will be made utilised.
- The school acknowledges the range of support options available. These can be accessed through ["Cost support for families"](#) and include
 - access to State Schools' Relief support via the Principal to assist with uniforms, shoes, textbooks, and stationery
 - the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which is available for eligible families, to cover the costs of school trips, camps and sporting activities
 - welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.

Support Options for Families

Where parents have difficulty providing or paying the school to provide essential student learning items, the Principal will support parents to make an appointment to discuss with them alternative payment

methods. Every effort will be made to support students and families experiencing difficulty with payments.

Responding to Parental Hardship

The school has a commitment and responsibility to take a **pro-active approach** and to be responsive to parents who may be experiencing either short term or long-term hardship and are unable to make the requested payments. This includes offering options which support and assist those parents and early identification and engagement strategies to ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and linked with available supports when experiencing hardship.

Consideration of hardship arrangements and concessions are provided to families experiencing long term financial hardship or short-term crisis on a confidential, case-by-case basis. Consideration will be given to the impact on the student and any determination must ensure that outcomes for the student are kept at the forefront of decision-making. This approach provides for an individualised, family-centred and student outcomes focus that necessarily requires thoughtful consideration of each situation.

The school has a written hardship consideration policy, which will be communicated to parents clearly and in a timely manner. These arrangements ensure that:

A proactive approach is taken in providing hardship support. The school has early identification and engagement strategies to ensure parents are well-informed of the payment options. Teachers will often be the first to detect signs of family stress and/or hardship from students. A clear process for guiding teachers to follow-up and provide the necessary support and information to students and parents will be well communicated to them by the School Leadership Team.

All parents/carers will be provided with the name and contact details (phone number and email address) of a nominated Parent Payment Contact Person.

This school has nominated to fulfil this role.

Parents will be assured that their child/children will have access to the educational opportunities being offered by the school.

The Parent Payment Contact Person undertaking this function will do so with sensitivity, respect and understanding to ensure she/he is responsive to families' needs.

It is not acceptable to use coercion or harass parents/carers to obtain payment.

The Contact Person has authority to use their discretion within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to agree on the appropriate forms of support and assistance. These options may include, but are not restricted to:

- waiving of fees
- reduced fees
- deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- flexible payment plans
- cost saving options such as substituting one item for another, second-hand options e.g. uniforms, text books, resources, stationery, using resources that can be loaned from the school
- referral to government and/or community assistance programs

When discussing payment and support options with parents, the Parent Payment Contact Person is required by DET to:

- allow parents to be accompanied by a support person or community advocate if they choose to do so
- explain to parents that the learning and teaching program builds on the free instruction in the standard curriculum and outline how parent payments support educational outcomes
- outline that the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services made available or provided by the school to a child of the parent (section 2.3.6(c))

- assure parents that their children will be supported to participate in learning activities regardless of the family's inability to pay
- enable parents to nominate a payment and/or schedule they can afford
- provide information on the supports available, including government assistance programs, legal and/or financial counselling and assistance from local community and welfare organisations and refer parents where applicable
- abide by the hardship policy principles in the practice and delivery of hardship support to families
- abide by principles of good practice in this policy

The Parent Payment Contact Person is expected to be aware of and inform families of any second-hand options available for materials and resources commonly required by students, e.g. uniforms, textbooks, calculators and stationery, and encourage and explore ways to make quality second-hand books and uniforms available to parents in need.

The school will assess where there may be barriers to learning and participation for students on the basis of financial hardship.

- In the event of a parent complaint, the school will refer to the *Complaints Policy*.
- Please refer also to the school's *Personal Devices – Parent Payments Policy, Support for Families Experiencing Hardship Policy* and to other links on the DET website below.

Evaluation

- As part of the Department's and each school's commitment to ongoing improvement, and ensuring that the impact of policies and practices on students are assessed in an ongoing way, implementation of the Parent Payment Policy and school practice must be reviewed as follows:
 - School Councils have a key role in ensuring the school level approach to parent payments reflects the shared expectations of the whole school community and is therefore responsible for monitoring effectiveness and impact on parents and students.
 - The Department will undertake regular audits for compliance with the Parent Payment Policy.
- This policy will be reviewed at least annually (or if guidelines change) as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the school community (latest DET update mid-March 2020).

A mandatory policy

School Council Approval Required

This policy was ratified by School Council 21.10.2020

Reference:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/parentpayments.aspx

Understanding Parent Payment Categories

Schools

What does the legislation say?

The Education and Training Reform Act (2006) provides for free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools. The Act also empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services provided by the school to a child.

In the Act, a 'Parent' includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for a child including parental responsibility under the Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

What do schools pay for as part of 'free instruction'?



Free instruction is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with the instruction of the standard curriculum program, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

The standard curriculum for Years F-10 means implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10.

The standard curriculum for senior secondary schools means a program that enables a student to be awarded a VCE or VCAL qualification.

What principles govern parent payment practice?

Educational Value | Access, Equity & Inclusion | Affordability

Engagement & Support | Respect & Confidentiality | Transparency & Accountability

Parents

What may parents be asked to pay for?

Schools can request payment for Essential Student Learning Items



These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own.

These may also be either:

Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of

- e.g.
- textbooks, activity books, exercise books
 - stationery, book bags
 - student ID cards, locks
 - cooking ingredients students will consume
 - materials for final products that students take home (technology projects, build-your-own kits, dioramas)
 - Picture Exchange Communication Systems

Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend

i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation

- e.g.
- excursions
 - incursions
 - school sports
 - work placements

Parents can be asked to pay for items, activities and services in the three Parent Payment Categories:

Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Schools determine how items, activities and services are classified within these categories based on the learning and teaching program of their school.

Schools can request payment for Optional Items

These are items, activities or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

Students may access these on a user-pays basis.

These may be either:

Items the student purchases or hires

- e.g.
- school magazines, class photos
 - functions, formals, graduation dinners
 - materials for extra curricular programs
 - student accident insurance

Activities the student purchases

- e.g.
- fees for extra curricular programs or activities, such as instrumental music tuition
 - fees for guest speakers
 - camps, excursions, incursions, sports
 - entry fees for school run performances

Items and/or materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum

- e.g.
- use of silver in metal work instead of copper
 - supplementary exam revision guides

Support for families experiencing hardship is available at every school and each school has a parent payment contact person. See your school's policy for more information.

For more information on Parent Payments and Personal Devices, visit the DET website at: www.education.vic.gov.au

Schools can invite **Voluntary Financial Contributions** for



- e.g.
- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
 - Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose, such as equipment, materials, services.
 - General voluntary contributions

